

The rebels have avoided the burning village by a detour."

"And must overtake us!"

"Little doubt of that."

The heart of the cornet beat wildly, as he thought of the fearful promise he had made.

"When the major comes up," continued the speaker, "we must make a stand to enable our comrades and the ladies to reach the temple."

As he rode along, Wharton noticed that the long grass, from the excessive drought, rustled dry and crisply beneath his horse's feet, and an idea, almost as desperate as their situation, struck him.

"I have it," he said; "let us fire the jungle."

There was a pause before the commander of the handful of men, who formed the rear-guard, replied to him.

"It is our only chance," he observed, and the next instant he gave the word to halt.

Each soldier drew his rein and sat silently and unconcerned in his saddle, as if on the old parade-ground at Calcutta. The order was given, and the mode of executing it explained. Half the party dismounted, and began cutting, with their sabres, the long grass and reeds which they formed into bundles, and placed at equal distances. By the time they had completed their task, their comrades rode up.

"Ride for your lives," shouted Plinlimmon, the instant he recognized them; "the rebels are at least two thousand strong."

"And how far off?" demanded the captain.

"About a mile."

"Plenty of time, major," said Dr. Burke, coolly.

In all probability the choleric Welchman would have made some not very complimentary rejoinder on finding his authority so unceremoniously treated, had not shortness of breath prevented him. Before he could recover it, Burke had explained to him the suggestion of Wharton, and the steps already taken to carry it into execution.

"Capital!" he exclaimed; "we'll smoke the rascals."

Drawing his men into a wide gully, or ravine, which intersected the jungle for several miles, the major gave orders to the dismounted hussars to fire the grass. The red flames rose rapidly, and dense volumes of smoke began to spread like a veil of darkness through the atmosphere.

Several of the brave fellows volunteered to ride in various directions, scattering their burning brands, in order to increase the conflagration. The slight wind fortunately proved in a favorable direction; and when the rebel rajah and his forces came up, they found an impassable barrier of fire between them and the gallant band they had looked upon as an easy prey. Vainly they tried to penetrate it; foiled in the attempt, their next endeavor was to pass beyond the limits of the sea of flame. But the flames were swifter than their steeds; the disappointed chief cursed the Christians in the impotence of his fury, and reluctantly gave orders for a retreat, consoling himself with the reflection that in a hostile country and unsupported by their countrymen they must ultimately perish.

In his rage and mortification he had forgotten the temple, and the indomitable energies of the Saxon race, destined to be once more proved to the world by a succession of achievements unparalleled in the history of warfare.

The danger which menaced the rear-guard of the gallant 01st was far from being over yet, for the fire spread with a rapidity which threatened not only the pursuers but the pursued, forcing the latter in several instances to make long and painful detours from the track to avoid it. Sometimes they were startled by a mingled herd of frightened deer and antelopes dashing madly past them, hunted by the pitiless flames, which crept stealthily along the ground, where the grass proved scant or low, then rose into fury, like a pack of hounds in full cry suddenly opening on the scent, when they came to a more luxuriant vegetation.

It was singular to notice the effect which terror had produced upon the animal creation. Leopards, especially the chetah or hunting species, mingled with the flying herd, without attempting to select a victim—fear had subdued the ferocity of their nature, and more than one royal tiger crossed the path of the retreating soldiers, its head close to the ground, and tail hanging like a torpid snake between its legs.

So passionately fond was Major Plinlimmon of the chase, that, had he been riding for less than life, nothing could have restrained him from his favorite sport.

We must now leave the retreating party for awhile and request the attention of our readers whilst we describe what was going on in the great quadrangle of the temple, where the inhabitants of the now blazing village, by command of the Brahmins and the rajah had conveyed not only their provisions and cattle but whatever else of value they possessed.

Al Moorad, Nadir, the chief priest, the native magistrate, and collector were standing in the light gallery which ran round the principal dome of the building, watching the progress of the flames. There was an expression of intense satisfaction on the withered face of the Brahmin, who doubted not but an instalment of the debt of hatred, due by the Christian rulers of his country had been paid. A shade of anxiety, on the contrary, rested on the features of the banker. As for their companions, they continued to gaze with that marked apathy peculiar to Asiatics. They had assured them of success, and they trusted to their promise as to the oracles of fate.

"How rapidly the flames extend," observed Al Moorad, addressing Nadir.

"The land shall be purged with fire," replied the old man—"it is not written in the Vedas!—and prepared for the last incarnation of Vishnu!"

"I may rely on Acbar's promise to respect the life of Lillian?"

"As on mine."

"Should he behold her face and be fascinated by her charms?" urged the former speaker, seized with a sudden feeling of jealousy.

"He has a mistress more beautiful," answered the Brahmin, impatiently—"ambition and the desire of avenging the wrongs of his outraged race; besides," he added, "have we not a pledge that might satisfy even a lover's doubts? Are not his treasures concealed within the temple—his heavy guns and ammunition?"

"He may require them," observed the banker, "to hold his fort."

"Not so; it is sufficiently armed already."

Here the two speakers were interrupted by the native police magistrate calling their attention to the progress of the flames, which, by this time, had spread so widely that it was evident they had extended beyond the village.

"Acbar has fired the jungle," exclaimed Nadir, in a tone of triumph. "Not a Christian will escape him."

"And Lillian—the prize for which I have risked so much," exclaimed Al Moorad.

"Doubtless is in his hands," answered the priest, calmly. "I sent a sure and faithful agent to the village, who would have returned ere this had the designs of the rajah been suspected."

The speaker alluded to the pretended fakir who had fallen, as we have seen, into the hands of the colonel of the 01st.

Before emerging from the jungle, the main body of the regiment was overtaken by the Major and his party. As the latter rode up, Sir Charles pressed his hand warmly, and thanked him for the skill and courage with which he had executed his instructions.

"The idea of setting fire to the long grass," he observed, "was a master-stroke; it has placed an insuperable barrier between ourselves and the rebels."

"Little doubt of that," replied the Welshman, wiping the dust and perspiration from his brow, "but the credit of the plan belongs to another."

"To whom?"

"Wharton," answered Plinlimmon.

"Where is he?" inquired the commander.

"Riding by the carriage with Lady Bell and the ladies."

At the name of his wife the lips of the veteran slightly quivered.

"By heavens, Fourreau!" continued the speaker, "she is a noble creature. Her voice sounded as cheerfully when we came up with her as in our old quarters at Calcutta."

"But don't you think this plan of Wharton's may be turned to account?"

"In what way?"

"By concealing our approach to the temple."

The idea was no sooner suggested than acted upon, and a number of men sent forward with orders to fire the skirts of the jungle, which soon sent forth a vast cloud of flame and smoke, under cover of which the regiment dashed rapidly across the plain, and took possession of the gate before the crowd within the quadrangle suspected that the enemy of whose destruction they felt so confident were in the vicinity.

As not even a guard had been posted within the court, resistance was useless, scarcely any attempt being made to oppose their entrance, and the fugitives were masters of the place before Nadir and his companions were aware of their danger. At first the aged Brahmin mistook them for the rajah and his victorious troops. Great was his rage and disappointment when he discovered that they were English.

"May the gods of India," he exclaimed, "confound them in their impious triumph. The shrine of Mariatele is profaned."

"And what is worse," added Al Moorad, "we shall be prisoners."

The native police magistrate and collector, who knew how little reason they had to expect mercy at the hands of the victors, appeared panic struck.

"Not so," replied the priest; "the goddess will preserve us."

The banker gave an inarticulate "Umph!" probably from his long association with Europeans, his faith was not so lively as it once had been.

"There is a means of escape known only to those of my sacred order," continued the speaker; "swear by the Vedas never to reveal it, and you shall share my flight."

It is scarcely necessary to add that the required oath was readily taken: that done, Nadir descended from the gallery to the temple, and calling his brother Brahmins around him, proceeded with them to a large recess at the back of the shrine.

"Let the doors be closed," he exclaimed.

With the assistance of his companions, the heavy bronze gates were rolled upon their hinges.

"Now draw the bolts," cried Al Moorad.

"Not a bolt must be drawn," replied the chief priest, "or the Christians will suspect the path by which we escape them; there is no other means of egress visible."

At the command of the speaker, one of the younger Brahmins sprang upon the altar, which was surmounted by the statue of the goddess, and pressed a spring concealed in the folds of her girdle. A low rumbling noise was heard, as the idol slowly moved aside, and disclosed a narrow staircase descending through the altar, which was of solid stone.

Nadir was the last to disappear, and long before the enemy had penetrated beyond the quadrangle of the temple, the statue of the goddess Mariatele had resumed its accustomed place.

On reaching the bottom of the staircase, the fugitives found themselves in an immense hall or subterranean temple, adorned with grotesque sculptures cut in the solid rock. From this hall, passages diverged in various directions, some leading to prisons, others to those secret shrines where rites were celebrated too fearful to be described, and to which only the initiated were admitted. But what chiefly attracted the attention of the banker and collector were ten long brass guns ranged against the wall. They were evidently of European make, and had been sent by the rajah for safety, in the event of his fort falling into the hands of the English.

"Could we have foreseen this blow," observed the former, "we might have defended the temple against the accursed ferrenghees."

"The wisdom of the wise has been confounded," replied the chief Brahmin, bitterly; "it is some consolation that we have not fallen into their hands."

"But the ammunition and treasures of Acbar have," said the magistrate.

The old man smiled: the treasures were the last things he was likely to have forgotten.

"The goddess has rebuked us for our pride and self-reliance," he made answer; "for, after all, what is the sum of human knowledge? Less than nothing. Mariatele will turn our seeming defeat into a holy triumph."

"But we shall starve here," observed the collector, not much delighted at the prospect before him.

"Mariatele will feed her votaries."

"What if the British should discover the entrance from the shrine?"

"Mariatele will defend us," replied the Brahmin.

"Let this assurance console you: alive, we shall never fall into their hands. There is ammunition enough in this cavern temple to rend the massive roof asunder, and involve the Christians in the same destruction with ourselves."

The Hindoo appeared anything but gratified at this intelligence. He was a heavy, oleaginous-looking man, with a sensual expression of countenance, and evidently possessed little or no ambition to obtain the honors of martyrdom.

Several of the Brahmins, having lit their torches at the brazen lamps which illuminated the hall, now led the way through one of the numerous passages, till they arrived at a row of cells, each cut in the solid rock; the doors which closed them were of iron; and Al Moorad observed that massive chains were drawn across two of them.

He glanced at his companion with an inquiring look.

"Kehoda!" whispered Nadir, as he pointed to the first.

"The banker shuddered. He knew the fate reserved for the inextinguishable laws of the priesthood, for the unhappy Nautch girl."

[TO BE CONTINUED IN OUR NEXT.]

We do not want precepts so much as patterns.

WHERE ALLAN PERCY ROAMED WITH ME.

BY SALLIE M. BRYAN.

The twilight's purple gloom again
Falls sweetly, sadly here,
As on that eve—and one wild strain
Floats from the forest near.

While listening to the wind's low moan
Beside this haunted tree,
With clouded heart I stand alone,
Wrapped in a dream of thee.

Here once we wandered and thy breast
Seemed thrilled with love's soft spell;
Against thy heart my hand was prest,
And words of passion fell.

A breeze like this flung from thy brow
The careless-curling hair;
And those blue eyes—where gaze they now?
Oh, angels, tell me where!

Joy like I knew with thee, again
Earth cannot give to me!
That autumn night—laurels heart and brain
But—am I right to thee?

Oh, I will wander here no more—
A spell weighs on the air,
And memories from the graves of yore
Rise up to mock despair.

THE BEAUTIFUL DECOY.

FROM THE UNPUBLISHED CHRONICLE OF A TRAVELER.

BY AN OLD CONTRIBUTOR.

It is well known to all in any degree familiar with the history of Mexico, that a regular system of highway robbery exists in every section of that miserably governed country; and that through a want of interference of the authorities, this has grown up into such a regular and formidable shape, that every traveler must be prepared to put his life at hazard at every stage, or be provided with a suitable contribution for *los caballeros del camino* (the knights of the road), who, in the event of finding you prepared and willing, will make their levy with a politeness only equalled by the smiling landlord, when he receives your overcharged fare for your last night's entertainment. Why such systematic boldness of robbery is allowed—if not with the connivance, at least with very rarely any interference, of the government or state authorities—is one of those mystical matters which among many others, so puzzles and perplexes the intelligent foreigners; but that such is the disagreeable truth, every traveler through that wretched country can bear ample testimony.

Some years ago, having business which first called me to the Capital of Mexico, and thence through the interior of the country to the northward, I met with several thrilling adventures, which I have recorded for the benefit of whosoever may take an interest therein, omitting only the dates, they being non-essential to the interest of the narrations themselves.

The first of the series occurred on the route between Vera Cruz and the city of Mexico. In the regular diligencia running between the places just mentioned, I had taken passage, and had passed through the beautiful city of Jalapa, and entered the gloomy town of Perote, without meeting with any unusual incident, though being continually warned to be on my guard against the dangers of the road. At Perote, where we halted for a relay and refreshments, all my fellow-passengers took leave of me, very solemnly assuring me that, if assailed by the *ladrones*, or robbers, it would be much better for me to take matters quietly, and suffer myself to be gently plundered, than to run the risk of having my throat cut for resistance, as I had somewhat boldly proclaimed it was my intention of doing. I thanked them for their advice, and replied that I would take the matter into serious consideration.

At Perote, I repeat, all who had been my companions from Vera Cruz took leave of me, this being the end of their journey in that direction; but there was one new passenger here to go forward, whom, to my agreeable surprise, I found to be a beautiful young lady, some twenty years of age.

Senorita Paula, as I subsequently ascertained her name to be, was indeed one of those rare beauties seldom met with except in works of fiction—tall, graceful, with a profusion of long, black hair—soft, clear, melting dark eyes—features as perfect as ever came from the hands of the sculptor, and with an animation the most fascinating, varying in expression with every changing mood of the intellectual possessor. A glance at her bewitching dark eyes showed me that she was one who was naturally of a social disposition; and as we rattled away from the gloomy town, I took the liberty of opening a conversation.

"They tell me," said I, "that the route between here and Mexico is a very dangerous one to travel."

"There is little to fear," she replied, with a sweet smile, and in a melodious tone, "except from the professional robbers, and they seldom harm any one who makes no resistance."

"It seems strange to me," I rejoined, "that you Mexicans should take such things as a matter of course, and deem resistance a very impolite way of treating the knights of the road, instead of boldly asserting your rights, and abating the evil by a manly spirit of resistance. For myself, I must consider it the most cowardly of proceedings, for any respectable party to set out prepared to quietly gratify the cupidity of the *ladrones*, and unprepared to treat them to their just deserts."

"Every traveler, Senor," she replied, "should, before setting out, count the cost of his journey; and as of course it is natural he should value his life highly, it seems to me natural that he should pay a certain sum for positive safety, rather than put that life in jeopardy. For instance, in traveling from Vera Cruz to Mexico, if he will first reckon that so much is the fare by the diligencia, and that so much will be required for entertainment on the way, and so much for the contingency you speak of, he will then have the exact cost between the two points; and if he will look at the whole as the sum total of his journey, he will not seem to be robbed by any one party more than another."

"That," I replied, "may be, I believe is, the Mexican mode of doing business, but does not tally with the preconceived ideas of us foreigners."

"But every one," replied the fair speaker, "should conform to the customs of the country he visits."

"And do you then go prepared for this highway robbery? and have you no fear in thus journeying by yourself?"

"Well, Senor, what can I do? I am, as you perceive, an unprotected lady, who, for certain reasons, am required to make the journey between Perote and the Capital some twice or thrice a year, and you certainly could not expect me to go pre-

pared to resist an armed band! As to fear, I will not deny I have my share of that; but, so far, I have never met with any rough treatment, and of course I trust to the saints that my fortune will ever be as propitious."

"And have you really been robbed on your journey back and forth?" I inquired.

"I think I have paid my share to the *ladrones* for my transit through their country!" she laughed.

"And you expect to continue a repetition of the same for the rest of your life?"

"Who knows?" she replied. "At least I hope to be always prepared."

"And your fellow travelers?" said I; "have you never seen any disposed to resist these unlawful acts?"

"Once, Senor, an American and an Englishman, who were in the same diligencia with me, fired upon the robbers, killing one and wounding two."

"And did the robbers fire back?"

"Yes, but fled immediately, and fortunately injured none of our party."

"As I should have expected," returned I. "You were not robbed on that occasion, I suppose?"

"We were not, Senor; but the two foreigners subsequently paid dearly for their resistance; for in journeying back and forth, both were killed, separately and at different times, near the same spot. You see these crosses by the side of the road, Senor?"

"I have observed them frequently, but here they seem to be much more numerous," I replied, looking forth from the vehicle.

"Each stands on the spot where some one has met a violent death," she rejoined; "and as we go along, I will call your attention to those which mark the places where the foreigners met theirs."

"Do you know," said I, "that I am resolved to emulate their example, let the consequences be what they may?"

"Holy saints defend us!" she exclaimed; "you are not in earnest, Senor?"

"Seriously so, I assure you."

"You would only bring certain death upon us both."

"Say, rather, I should lighten the expenses of the journey—for your knights of the road understand retreat as well as advance—and you yourself have acknowledged that firm resistance put them to flight for once."

"But there were numbers opposed to them, Senor, and you are only one."

"But fortunately I have a couple of revolvers, which, in two good hands, amount to some ten or a dozen shots, and my friends have repeatedly told me I am not a bad marksman."

"Ah! Santa Maria! you will think better of this, Senor!—the very idea of resistance terrifies me!"

"But not the idea of robbery?"

"Because I have never met with violence."

We continued to converse in a similar strain for some time longer—my fair companion gradually changing the subject, and seeming much interested in myself. I learned that her family name was Valerde, that she was unmarried, that her father and brother were officers in the army, and so forth, and so on; and in return I gave her my own name, stated something of my history, business and prospects, and altogether became more communicative than I would advise any friend to be with any stranger of either sex in a strange country.

As we continued our journey, the conversation gradually changing from one thing to another, Senorita Paula suddenly brought it back to the point where it first opened.

"We are coming upon a dangerous part of the road," she said; "are you still resolved to defend yourself if assailed?"

"With your permission, Senorita."

"I do not think it advisable," she replied; "but still, if such is your intention, I think it no more than right that you should give me a chance to take a part in my defense, since my risk of danger will be as great as yours!"

"And have you really the nerve, after all, to defend yourself?" I inquired.

"If I had the means, Senor."

"I have two pistols," said I; "if you will accept of one of them, it is at your service?"

"You are very kind, Senor—but can I fire it?"

"With ease, Senorita!" and producing one of my revolvers, I explained to her the manner in which it was to be used.

"And this, you say, will shoot some half a dozen times?"

"I think it safe to calculate that five charges out of the six will explode, Senorita."

"A very formidable weapon, indeed!" she replied; "and with such I can almost fancy we are safe. You have another, you say, like this?"

I produced it.

"What a beautiful invention!" she observed, reaching over and taking it from my hand. Then extending her hands, one of the revolvers in each, she continued: "Armed like this, one might almost count himself safe against a host! You say this is fired in this manner?" she proceeded, cocking one of the weapons as she spoke, and pointing it toward the road.

"Have a care, Senorita, or you will discharge it!"

The words were scarcely uttered, when her finger pressed the trigger, and one of the barrels was exploded with a sharp report. A minute after, and while I was gently chiding her, we heard a loud, quick tramp of horses, and several sharp, rapid exclamations. The next moment our conveyance was stopped suddenly, and we saw ourselves surrounded by some eight or ten mounted men, one of whom, in a loud voice, exclaimed:

"Yield you prisoners or die!"

"Quick, Senorita!" said I, extending my hand: "quick! in Heaven's name! give me one of those weapons! for now is our time for decisive action!"

"Nay," she replied, putting the weapons behind her, "you will be too hasty! Let them suppose we yield—let them open the door!"

"Oh, no! it will then be too late!"

As I spoke, the door was suddenly thrown open, and three or four swarthy, heavily-bearded men presented themselves to my view.

"Quick, Senorita, for the love of God!" I cried, grasping at her arm.

"Hold!" she exclaimed, instantly presenting one of my own revolvers to my head. "Resistance is useless—you are our prisoner!"

"Good God!" exclaimed I, perfectly astounded: "Our prisoner did you say? It is not possible that one so fair and lovely as yourself is in any manner connected with these banditti!"

"It is even so, Senor," she replied, with one of her most bewitching smiles, still keeping one of my own weapons turned against myself, and significantly pointing the other to the door. "You will oblige us by stepping forth and giving yourself into the care of these good gentlemen, who will see that you are treated as a brave man should be, but who will trouble you meantime for any little change and valuables you might have to spare!"

There seemed to be no help for it—the beautiful

Senorita Paula Valerde was a spy and accomplice of the *ladrones*. She had entered the diligencia at Perote for no other purpose than to ascertain the exact condition of things inside, and be able to signalize her associates as she passed along, so that they might know exactly in what manner to conduct themselves and make their work sure without risk. By a simple stratagem she had obtained my arms, just at the point where she knew the attack would be made; and her discharge of the pistol, as if by accident, was the sign to show them that all was secure.

"I acknowledge myself conquered by being outwitted!" said I, bowing to la Senorita.

Then turning to the robbers, who had now collected in a body, in front of the door of the diligencia, I continued:

"Gentlemen, will you permit me to alight and make you some valuable presents? In the language of your country, 'all I have is yours!'"

The leader of the party bowed politely in return, and said, with a grim smile:

"Si, Senor, we shall be most happy to receive anything which so distinguished a traveler may have to bestow."

With this I quietly stepped from the vehicle; and one quick, searching glance put me in possession of the whole state of affairs. The diligencia had been stopped in a wild, gloomy place, and the driver was sitting carelessly on his box, taking everything as a matter of course. He might also be an accomplice of the robbers, or he might not, but in either case, there was little hope of assistance from him—for any attempt of the kind would certainly bring upon him a severe punishment, sooner or later. I glanced up and down the road, where it wound between dark, overshadowing trees, but discovered nothing to give me any hope. The robbers, some eight or ten in number, and all well armed, were collected around me, part of them mounted, and the others standing on their feet, holding their mustangs by the bridle. Looking upon my case as a desperate one, so far as being plundered was concerned, I still retained my presence of mind, and did not wholly despair. True, I had been outwitted, and disarmed, and now stood singly between numbers; but the idea of yielding tamely to this outrage was repugnant to my very nature, and I resolved to put the least favorable opportunity for defense and retaliation to the strongest test.

"Will you accept this purse?" said I, producing one that held several gold coins, and handing it to the chief of the *ladrones*.

"Thank you, Senor! you are very kind!" he said, as he took it in his hand, with a polite bow, and chinked the money.

"This diamond pin may prove acceptable to your friend?" I added, as I quietly removed it from the bosom of my shirt, and handed it to the gentleman on his left, who received it in the same polite manner.

"This diamond ring I trust you will retain as a keepsake!" I continued, drawing the jewel from my finger, and presenting it to a third. "I beg your pardon, Senores," I pursued, glancing